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Chairman: Ms. Malinovska ..... (Latvia)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica), Ms. Malinovska (Latvia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 42: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/62/12 and Add.1, A/62/316)

1. **Mr. Rachkov** (Belarus) said that a comprehensive system of legal and social protection for asylum-seekers was in place in Belarus. Relevant international standards had been incorporated into domestic legislation, which international experts had pronounced the best of its kind in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 2001, Belarus had become a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was responsible for implementing State policy on forced migration and for coordinating related activities of other national mechanisms. Since 1997, more than 3,000 asylum applications from 43 countries had been received and, as of 1 October 2007, 799 refugees from 13 countries had been granted asylum. The number of applications for asylum in Belarus was now decreasing.

2. Persons granted refugee status in Belarus enjoyed most of the same rights as citizens and a favourable environment had been created for their integration, with considerable support provided over the years by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Temporary accommodation centres for asylum-seekers had been opened in Vitebsk and at Minsk airport, while several hostels in Minsk, Mogilev and Minsk district had been renovated. A European Union UNHCR international technical assistance project for strengthening the national asylum system was being carried out at a cost of more than 400,000 euros. A bill had also been drafted to provide supplementary or temporary protection measures for refugees and stateless persons; although it had yet to be enacted, 22 foreigners had been granted temporary residence in Belarus in 2007 on humanitarian grounds. Under the international technical assistance project, a computerized system for registering refugees had been created and various awareness-raising initiatives had been launched to promote positive stereotypes of refugees. The project also involved the establishment in Gomel of another temporary accommodation centre for asylum-seekers. In addition, UNHCR was helping to train specialists in international refugee protection standards.

3. His Government looked forward to continued cooperation with UNHCR. It hoped that implementation of the Euro-Asian Programme on Forced Displacement and Migration would be stepped up and was willing to do its part by holding a future thematic consultation in Minsk.

4. **Mr. Amangoua** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the conflict in his country had led to vast refugee outflows and internal displacement for the first time in its history, resulting in the progressive deterioration of the country's economic, social and political structures, including those for the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. The only way out of such a situation, which had the potential to reignite conflict, was to find durable solutions. He therefore called upon Member States to provide UNHCR with the necessary financial resources to achieve its objectives, especially in the light of its current financial difficulties.

5. The Ivorian Minister for Foreign Affairs had met recently with donors in Geneva to reiterate his Government's concern at the inadequacy of the resources mobilized to assist internally displaced persons in Côte d'Ivoire. In that context, his delegation commended the efforts of the governmental Service d'Aide et d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Apatrides to mobilize donors and protect the rights of the country's 1 million internally displaced persons and thanked UNHCR for its active role in the Consolidated Appeals Process of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). His Government continued to work tirelessly towards achieving the objectives of UNHCR, improving the protection of refugees, meeting their food needs and enhancing their socio-economic integration in Ivorian society.

6. The sociopolitical crisis and the absence of international aid notwithstanding, his Government had taken measures for the repatriation and reintegration of Ivorian citizens. It believed that, the best solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons was peaceful settlement of the conflict, followed by voluntary return. African countries in general were aware of the need for good governance and for judicial and police structures to uphold the rule of law. His Government had therefore appealed to the

General Assembly for the partial lifting of the arms embargo, in order to allow the Ivorian State to fulfil its mission of protecting people and property. Equitable sharing of resources coupled with universal access to health care, education and food security, were indispensable social parameters in a democratic State and the surest means of avoiding frustrations that could spark social conflict and, potentially, bloodshed.

7. The United Nations and other development partners must show the political will to provide Africa with the assistance it needed to achieve regional economic integration and thereby meet the challenges of globalization. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) could play a crucial role in that process. His Government therefore welcomed the adoption of a disaster reduction policy by the West African Heads of State in January 2007 and the recent agreement concluded between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UNHCR.

8. African host countries, faithful to their humanitarian obligation of hospitality, often jeopardized their own economic, political and social situation by receiving thousands of their brothers and sisters in distress. He thanked international humanitarian agencies, local and international non-governmental organizations and goodwill ambassadors for their assistance in that regard.

9. **Ms. Mireault** (Canada) welcomed the High Commissioner's 10 commitments, particularly those concerning solutions, reform, partnership and protection. Long-term displacement situations were a symptom of complex ongoing conflicts. Sustainable peace was critical to the safe and voluntary return of displaced populations. Her Government stressed the need to address such situations as a matter of priority and urged Member States to provide more durable solutions by expanding local integration opportunities and resettlement programmes. Her Government supported the goals of the UNHCR structural and management reform process and commended the progress made to date. It also supported the efforts made to strengthen coordination in order to improve humanitarian response and the protection of internally displaced persons. It was crucial that the Emergency Relief Coordinator should play a strong advocacy role and that Inter-Agency Standing Committee members such as UNHCR should sustain the momentum generated to date.

10. Rather than assuming all operational responsibilities, UNHCR must enhance partnerships and inter-agency collaboration with implementing partners and other actors. Her delegation therefore noted with appreciation the leadership role played by UNHCR in the coordination of protection among humanitarian agencies and urged those agencies to work in partnership with it. While the increase in the number of "persons of concern" to UNHCR in the past year was attributable in part to the increased number of refugees in the world, she assumed that it was also related to an increase in internally displaced persons as a result of the office's cluster coordination responsibilities. Her delegation strongly encouraged UNHCR to define more precisely the meaning of "persons of concern" in order to clarify the scope and nature of its action.

11. Lastly, her delegation welcomed the commitment to protection and looked forward to the General Assembly's endorsement of the Executive Committee's Conclusion on children at risk, which advanced the normative and operational framework for the protection of forcibly displaced children. While her Government was committed to ensuring that the Executive Committee's conclusions addressed gaps in the international protection regime, it believed that UNHCR should ensure that age, gender and diversity were mainstreamed into its protection activities and that conclusions focused on broad protection issues. Her delegation encouraged Member States to commit fully to protection by becoming signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, since a growing number of Executive Committee Member States were not signatories to either instrument.

12. **Mr. Kruljevic** (Serbia) said that the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons was still very much present in his country and had strong domestic and international implications. Although his Government was investing great efforts to provide assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons throughout their protracted displacement, no significant progress had been made in the past year and the country was still providing shelter for a very large displaced population. The return of displaced persons to Kosovo and Metohija after eight years of international presence in Kosovo was purely symbolic and the lack of progress in that regard was attributable to the absence of security and the low level of human

rights protection in the province. Under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) had an obligation to ensure all necessary preconditions for a sustainable return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), but no progress could be made until the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights was guaranteed. During displacement, internally displaced persons were entitled to all the rights enjoyed by other Serbian citizens, including free access to education and health care, equal employment opportunities and participation in social and political life. Shelter was also provided to the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the situation remained very difficult and the number of IDPs was on the rise.

13. His Government's position was that voluntary return was the best solution for displaced persons and it had made significant efforts to promote both voluntary repatriation and local integration believing that the two processes were parallel and complementary. Lack of housing was the biggest problem, along with a lack of financial resources to address it.

14. Restitution of property and full respect for occupancy, tenancy and property rights were of paramount importance for refugees as they decided between repatriation and local integration. Despite the comprehensive Road Maps for the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration, his Government was still unable to proceed with the Joint Implementation Matrix because some outstanding issues were not included in the Road Map for Croatia. His Government remained committed to full implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration, but concrete improvements were needed in order for progress to be achieved.

15. **Mr. Bouchaara** (Morocco) said that emergency humanitarian action had become increasingly complex, as contemporary conflicts were totally different from those experienced during the cold war. Internal conflicts, the presence of non-State actors and arms trafficking made humanitarian action increasingly difficult. It was important therefore to reiterate that UNHCR must be physically present in the refugee camps under its responsibility; otherwise, effective and credible action to assist and protect refugees would be impossible. Moreover, the UNHCR international protection mandate must be fully respected, in accordance with the relevant international instruments. Refugee populations must not be left at the mercy of armed groups, meaning that the separation of civilians from armed groups in refugee camps must be a cardinal principle of UNHCR action.

16. A census of the refugee population was essential for any serious and credible humanitarian action and it was absurd that in some disputes, especially long-term ones, UNHCR was denied the right to take a census of the refugee population that it was supposed to protect. He could not see how the international community could accurately assess the needs of a refugee population that it was unable to count. The refusal by a host country to allow UNHCR to count a refugee population should be considered a violation of international law. Lastly, voluntary repatriation should continue to be the preferred solution for refugees, but every effort must be made to allow them, without threat or pressure of any kind, to express their wishes for their future.

17. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen) said that wars and instability led many people to flee their homeland in search of security and peace, with the result that the refugee problem persisted despite the efforts made to address it. His Government had been among the first to sign the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and the Yemeni Constitution protected the rights of refugees. The Government's commitment to implementing the Convention was based on humanitarian obligations, as well as Islamic tradition and custom.

18. According to UNHCR statistics, his country was host to more than 70,000 refugees from the conflicts in Somalia and other countries of the Horn of Africa; some 14,000 African refugees had arrived in Yemen since the beginning of the year. Despite the country's own economic difficulties, the Government had assumed the humanitarian responsibility of receiving those refugees. Camps had been set up and care had been provided to them, in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies. The Government had also worked to address the root causes of the refugee problem by attempting to mediate between the Somali factions with a view to ending the war in Somalia. The refugee problem had had a negative impact on Yemen, in terms of the economic burden that it imposed and related security, health and social issues, not to mention the infiltration of terrorism, drugs and weapons into the country.

19. His delegation commended the work done by UNHCR to meet the basic needs and ensure the protection of refugees and welcomed its internal reform efforts. In conclusion, it called upon States and international donor agencies to increase their support to refugee host countries to enable them to fulfil their obligations.

20. **Mr. Mashabane** (South Africa) said that his Government supported the durable solutions identified in the High Commissioner's report (A/62/12) and believed that they were critical for solving the problems faced by refugees. It welcomed the increased expenditure on resettlement, but regretted the decrease in other types of assistance. The High Commissioner's role in relation to internally displaced persons should be debated further. Mixed migratory flows continued to be a challenge in the Southern African subregion and must be addressed through dialogue at all levels to ensure that the institution of asylum was not compromised.

21. The focus on organizational and structural reform of UNHCR was welcome and his Government would like to see such reform lead to increased availability of resources for operations. The notion of increased partnership and better coordination with other role players, especially when carried out in close cooperation with Governments, was also welcome. With regard to the global priorities identified in the report, his Government, particularly welcomed recognition of the need to address health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as to ensure access to basic services, and would not like to see austerity measures continue to affect those priority areas. His delegation would like to know more about the set of procedural guidelines being developed to support process-related reforms and the new resource allocation model mentioned in paragraph 62 of the report.

22. His Government recognized the valuable work being done by UNHCR and would continue to assist it in meeting the challenges it faced in order to ensure that refugees and other vulnerable communities received the attention they deserved.

23. **Mr. Kapambwe** (Zambia) expressed concern that after a reduction in refugee flows in 2006, the number of refugees worldwide had increased from 8.4 million to over 10 million in the first half of 2007. Although the successful conclusion of peace agreements at the regional level in Africa had paved the way for the return of an estimated 2.1 million displaced persons, new emergencies had produced a new wave of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. It was disturbing that over half of the world's 24.5 million IDPs were in Africa, which remained the continent most affected by conflict-related internal displacement. His delegation welcomed the continued efforts made in that regard by the African Union, which had initiated a draft legal framework on internally displaced persons to ensure that IDP protection standards were adequately covered. A summit specifically dedicated to the refugee issue was planned for 2008 and he called on the international community and civil society to support that effort.

24. His country had been a host to refugees for over four decades and was currently hosting some 120,100 refugees from other African countries. Following the restoration of peace in Angola and the Great Lakes region, its major focus in recent years had been on voluntary repatriation, resulting in the return of some 150,000 refugees to their countries of origin. There was, however, a significant caseload of refugees who were reluctant to return home, mainly for various socio-economic reasons. Integrating those refugees locally was a major challenge both for Zambia as the host country and for the international community as a whole. That was a very emotive issue and required wide consultation with the Zambian people.

25. Over the years, there had been a steady reduction in the resources and services provided to refugees by the international community. The impact had been severe, particularly in the health and education sectors, with grave consequences especially for refugee women, children and vulnerable groups. When humanitarian disasters occurred, leading to large refugee outflows, the first countries of asylum were usually those who were themselves facing development challenges and critical resource constraints. Despite their goodwill, the competition for very limited resources between refugees and local communities often led to considerable tension and hostility between the two groups and even towards the Government on the part of its own citizens. Refugees and internally displaced persons were the responsibility of the international community and countries of asylum were carrying a burden on its behalf. Serious consideration should therefore be given to establishing a humanitarian credits regime, under United Nations

auspices, under which countries would be granted credits for looking after refugees that could qualify them for specified levels of additional assistance, in the same way that environmental protection credits were accumulated and redeemed.

26. In conclusion, he reiterated that the solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons lay in addressing the root causes of such displacement and that the international community must therefore step up its efforts in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding.

27. **Mr. Kinyanjui** (Kenya) said that his Government attached great importance to the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons and to the search for durable solutions. Its current experience in hosting refugees had shown that refugees were increasingly facing difficulties due to diminishing resources and security concerns. As host to over 200,000 refugees, most of them Somali, it underscored the importance of maintaining the civilian nature of refugee camps. The conflict situation in neighbouring countries had increased the insecurity in areas surrounding such camps and there had been a proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the region and in Kenya in particular. The international community must therefore assist Kenya in addressing those security concerns, particularly in countries of origin. Attacks on civilians, displaced persons and humanitarian actors also continued to hamper access to refugees, thereby exacerbating their already precarious situation.

28. Voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement in third countries were the three most important durable solutions to the refugee problem. For that reason, Kenya, with other countries, had invested heavily in peace efforts, particularly in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions, that had enabled displaced persons to return home. However, natural disasters, including drought and floods, had disrupted the lives of over 100,000 refugees in Kenya and caused an increase in refugee numbers in the region. Efforts to create conditions that would enable refugees to return home in conditions of safety and dignity must therefore continue. Lastly, turning to the problem of environmental degradation and economic hardship caused by the huge concentration of refugees in a confined area, he said that the provision of microcredit and other sustainable economic empowerment initiatives would increase refugees' self-reliance and help reduce tensions with host communities over meagre resources.

29. **Mr. Salim** (India) said that, more than five decades since the founding of UNHCR, the refugee problem remained persistent and global. At the same time, new challenges arising out of situations of internal displacement were needing greater attention. UNHCR was working in partnership with entities within and outside the United Nations and had assumed a lead role for conflict-induced internal displacement situations in the areas of protection, camp management and coordination and emergency shelter. The High Commissioner should clarify the implications of the renewed focus on internally displaced persons, although it was reassuring to hear that refugees would be given first priority in the allocation of limited UNHCR resources.

30. Refugee movements occurred primarily in developing countries and it was also those countries that bore most of the burden of hosting and protecting refugees. Their concerns needed to be recognized and addressed to a far greater extent and the development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, must underpin international efforts to prevent refugee flows and address refugees' needs for relief and rehabilitation.

31. Globalization had brought about more situations of mixed migratory flows and capacities must therefore be developed for differentiating refugees from economic migrants in order to better address their protection needs. Voluntary repatriation remained the best durable solution, but resettlement, especially in countries with the requisite economic means, was also a possibility. As for local integration, its implications as a policy option for dealing with refugees in a situation of mass exodus into developing countries were far reaching and must be considered carefully.

32. His delegation welcomed the positive results emerging from the structural and management reforms aimed at making UNHCR more flexible, effective and result-oriented. Efforts to enhance accountability and transparency must continue and UNHCR must preserve its operational impartiality and its non-political character.

33. The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, which had been adopted in the specific context of post-Second World War Europe, with a clear focus on cases of individual persecution, did not cover a number of

refugee-related issues. Moreover, implementation of the 1951 Convention often suffered because of lack of political will in some parts of the world or lack of means in others. India was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, as it did not address massive refugee flows or accompanying factors such as mixed migration. However, its commitment to humanitarianism was second to none and its refugee-related programmes were managed entirely from its own resources. Its protection regime was based on the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution and it had demonstrated clearly its commitment to the principles of protection and non-refoulement. It would continue to work closely with the international community to address the new and emerging challenges to the international protection agenda.

34. **Mr. Margarian** (Armenia) said that UNHCR had been instrumental in assisting his Government in addressing the burden created by the inflow of over 400,000 refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the population displaced as a result of the recent earthquake. The refugee population had been totally integrated into Armenian society through a successful naturalization programme. Currently, UNHCR was finalizing the results of an assessment of the refugee situation in Armenia in order to design programmes for the remaining refugee population and thus bring the situation to a close. It had also been helpful in analysing asylum legislation and drafting a new law with the country's Migration Agency. Targeted assistance from the international community was also needed for the population internally displaced from border regions as a result of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Extensive discussions had been held with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, and programmes that could be implemented through UNHCR would help to solve the IDP situation.

35. The security situation in Iraq had led to an influx of Iraqi Armenians over the past year. Those refugees had no means of sustenance and were thus a highly vulnerable group in need of urgent assistance. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the decisions by the Central Emergency Response Fund to allocate US$300,000 to the UNHCR office in Armenia to assist Iraqis who had found refuge in Armenia with preparations for winter. His Government looked forward to receiving additional support in 2008 for finding durable solutions for that vulnerable group.

36. **Ms. Mtawali** (United Republic of Tanzania) expressed concern at the dramatic increase in the number of refugees since 2006. That increase necessitated a deeper understanding of the root causes of refugee flows worldwide. In the African region, the overall downward trend in refugee numbers was continuing, while the number of returnees to be assisted was increasing. In Tanzania, it was encouraging to note that refugee numbers were decreasing as the voluntary repatriation exercise for refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo gained momentum. The country was still host to a large number of refugees, however: of the remaining 462,353 refugees, 233,674 were living in camps and receiving international assistance through UNHCR, while 228,679 were living in old settlements and were self-reliant.

37. For the repatriation exercise to be successful, it must be sustainable. The environment to which refugees returned must be conducive to their safety, security and well-being and basic social services such as education, health care, water and sanitation must be available. She therefore urged the international community to allocate the additional resources needed to ensure that there was adequate capacity in receiving countries to provide such an environment. International support was also required for the consolidation of peace and stability in countries of origin in order to permit reintegration of internally displaced persons and returnees.

38. As a host country, Tanzania had experienced devastating impacts on its environment as a result of the presence of large numbers of refugees. Assistance was therefore needed for rehabilitation of the environment and infrastructure of areas that had been accommodating refugees for decades. Development assistance was also necessary for host communities that had shared scarce resources and services with refugees. Hosting refugees took more than generosity; it was a burden and a responsibility that should be shared by the international community as a whole. Her delegation acknowledged in that connection the support provided by the European Union, Denmark and the United States of America for refugee resettlement programmes in Tanzania.

39. Her Government was pursuing all three main durable solutions advocated by UNHCR. It was currently attempting to find a lasting solution for the almost 230,000 refugees who had fled Burundi in

1972. A comprehensive census and registration process had found that only 20 per cent wished to return home, while 80 per cent would prefer to be integrated in Tanzania through naturalization. The Government was studying the key policy implications and challenges presented by the refugees' voluntary repatriation and local integration. At the same time, the country was witnessing an increase in the number of illegal immigrants from the Horn of Africa and would welcome initiatives from key partners to help it address that problem.

40. **Mr. Abderrhamane** (Mauritania) said that his Government was taking all necessary measures to ensure the return of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali. A ministerial committee had been established and had made a field visit to refugee camps in the two countries, while the Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, was finalizing arrangements for the refugees' return. His Government had given priority to national unity and human rights in its national development programme, in order to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and good governance and would help returnees to participate fully in nation-building.

41. **Mr. Bek** Bumhym (Republic of Korea) welcomed the ongoing UNHCR reform process. While UNHCR was doing commendable work, it could not solve all existing refugee problems single-handedly but required the strong support and unwavering commitment of the countries concerned. At a time of increased and mixed migratory flows, the refugee problem could become a thorny political and social issue in countries of transit or destination. Tighter border controls and restrictive screening measures gave cause for concern, however. Since refugees did not leave home by choice, refugee issues should be addressed from a humanitarian perspective, rather than a political, economic and social one. The principle of non-refoulement should be strictly applied, while refugee status should be broadened and standards of protection strengthened.

42. He drew attention to the difficult circumstances facing many stateless persons, including ethnic Koreans from the former Central Asian Soviet Republics, and called upon the countries concerned to restore their citizenship to them. His Government was currently revising its Immigration Act and related regulations in order to improve the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, including their right to work.

43. **Ms. Awino-Kafeero** (Uganda) said that as a result of the Lord's Resistance Army rebellion in northern Uganda, 2 million Ugandans had been forced into IDP camps, where conditions were appalling. In addition, Uganda was host to 200,000 refugees from neighbouring countries. She thanked UNHCR for its assistance to over 1.5 million IDPs in Uganda and its cooperation in the return of over 300,000 IDPs to their homes. Lastly, she emphasized the importance of attaining stability in the Sudan, Somalia and the Great Lakes region as a whole, as a first step towards controlling the influx of refugees and IDPs in the region.

44. **Ms. Abdelhak** (Algeria), referring to the many migrants who lost their lives in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden, said that Governments of the region, whether they were countries of origin or transit or host countries, had a responsibility to protect and assist those in need. Close cooperation was required among all the stakeholders, including the international financial institutions, to address the real structural causes of migratory movements on the African continent.

45. The growing number of IDPs and the mixed flow of migrants and asylum-seekers were making the task of UNHCR more complex, at a time when its resources were declining steadily. Its new areas of responsibility should not detract from its primary mission to protect refugees, however. At the same time, any burden-sharing should in future take account of the efforts made by host countries and the impact of prolonged refugee situations on their long-term economic and social development.

46. Algeria had been hosting refugees from Western Sahara for three decades. Conditions in the Tindouf refugee camps were harsh and the refugees were dependent on humanitarian aid. The decision by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) to halve assistance to the camps, taken after a questionable reassessment of the number of refugees, had further exacerbated the refugees' plight. Leaving them to go hungry was a flagrant violation of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and she called on UNHCR to recalculate the number of refugees in order to avoid deprivation and dissemination in the camps. In keeping with its apolitical vocation, UNHCR must continue to help the Saharan refugees and not allow them to become political pawns. The future of the Saharan refugees depended on a lasting solution of

the conflict over Western Sahara and the implementation of Security Council resolutions calling for a referendum on self-determination for the territory. Taking a census of its population, including its refugees, was an integral part of that process.

47. Her Government remained committed to the search for durable solutions to the refugee problem. Food aid was simply a palliative and the underlying causes must be addressed.

48. **Ms. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the refugee problem might appear to be a humanitarian issue, but was in fact political. In the case of Iraq, the international community needed to support the political reconciliation process, work towards the pull-out of foreign forces, assist in the country's reconstruction and unification and help the Government and people of Iraq achieve security and stability. That involved assisting Iraqi returnees and future generations of Iraqis in building a stable future in their country. In that regard, her delegation did not endorse attempts to naturalize Iraqi refugees outside their own country, but called for their return to it in order to avoid dispersal and loss of identity and cultural heritage. Her Government applied the same principle to Palestinian refugees: a just and comprehensive solution must be found that guaranteed the Palestinian people the full enjoyment of all their national rights, including the right of return as provided by international law, the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolution 194 (1949), and the right to establish an independent and sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital.

49. She stressed her Government's support for the peoples of the region. Syria had witnessed a steady influx of Iraqis ever since the war had begun in March 2003. Millions of Iraqis had fled to Syria to escape insecurity and instability in their own country. Although some had since returned, some 1.5 million remained in Syria. The steady increase in the number of immigrants and asylum-seekers was cause for concern, as it imposed a heavy burden on Syria's economic infrastructure and adversely affected social and health services and the living conditions of Syrian citizens. The total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria exceeded 2 million, accounting for 12 per cent of the country's population, and the Government had spent over US$ 1.6 billion on emergency humanitarian assistance in the past two years.

50. Her Government had been working with the Iraqi Government to establish an assistance mechanism for Iraqi refugees in Syria and to provide for their return once stability and security were restored in Iraq and foreign forces were withdrawn. A joint parliamentary committee had been established to create a database that would help identify possible solutions and a Jordanian-Iraqi-Syrian joint committee was studying the situation of Iraqi refugees in order to provide assistance to those living in Jordan and Syria. In conclusion, she expressed her Government's appreciation for the High Commissioner's work and its willingness to cooperate with UNHCR in improving the situation of Iraqi refugees.

51. **Mr. Al-Dekhail** (Kuwait) said that the increase in the number of refugees worldwide was cause for concern and required the international community to support UNHCR efforts to provide protection and assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons. In keeping with its humanitarian obligations, his Government was committed to supporting UNHCR through annual contributions and the hosting of a UNHCR office. He welcomed the structural and administrative reform of UNHCR, which was intended to increase its flexibility in meeting beneficiaries' needs by reducing administrative overheads in the field and improving field operations. His Government provided assistance to refugees worldwide and had consistently provided humanitarian assistance and support to Palestinian refugees. It was also assisting the over 200,000 Lebanese nationals who had been internally displaced by the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006 and whose return had been delayed by the need to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by Israel and to remove landmines in southern Lebanon. His Government also supported the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) through annual contributions to its regular budget. The active role of Kuwaiti charitable organizations and civil society organizations in that regard was also noteworthy.

52. **Mr. Nikooharf Tamiz** (Islamic Republic of Iran) recalled that his country had opened its doors to millions of Afghan refugees nearly 30 years previously, even though it had been in the midst of its Islamic revolution and crippled by economic sanctions. It had provided residence permits and all other benefits to the refugees, yet had received scant international assistance. In addition, of the over 200,000 registered

Iraqi refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran, more than 50,000 were still waiting to return home and continued to require adequate international assistance. The continuing unrest in Iraq would probably result in new waves of refugees and IDPs, adding to the 2.5 million and 2 million, respectively that currently existed, with serious consequences for Iraq and its neighbouring host countries.

53. His Government had supported not only Afghan and Iraqi refugees, but also their newly formed Governments by, inter alia, granting scholarships to Afghan university students, participating in reconstruction projects and strengthening commercial ties and investments. The international community failed to appreciate the extent to which his Government had dealt with the refugee problem by keeping the refugees within its own borders, however.

54. The voluntary repatriation programme for Afghan refugees, managed jointly by UNHCR and his Government, had begun in 2002 and had been extended five times. More than 1.4 million Afghans had returned home, either under the programme or on their own initiative. In addition, his Government was offering a work permit to one member of any family that returned to Afghanistan, in order to enable that person to return legally to work in the Islamic Republic of Iran and thereby help maintain the family's living standards.

55. Given the presence of more than 950,000 Afghan refugees and displaced persons in his country and the very slow pace of voluntary repatriation, he stressed the importance of resettlement in third countries. Receiving countries should make efforts to increase their capacity to take in refugees and displaced persons, especially the most vulnerable, since that responsibility should be shared more evenly. The Islamic Republic of Iran should not have to shoulder responsibility for 10 per cent of the world's refugee population.

56. **Ms. Petersen** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that UNHCR activities to assist IDPs should not undermine its mandate to protect refugees. Her Government's commitment to assisting refugees, returnees and IDPs was reflected in its domestic legislation, its compliance with international norms and the measures it had adopted to integrate refugees. In response to the growing number of requests for refugee status over the past year, the number of UNHCR programmes in border areas had been increased. With regard to durable solutions such as local integration, her Government integrated asylum-seekers and refugees into the Venezuelan socio-economic system, giving them the right to work, health and education. Recently, they had been granted the right to engage in banking transactions and open bank accounts.

57. The increasing numbers of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons in the world was cause for concern. She reiterated that countries of origin bore primary responsibility for addressing the root causes of that phenomenon. With respect to the inter-agency cluster approach, future reports should give more detailed information on the division of labour among agencies and criteria on which it was based, so that Member States could monitor their respective activities and responsibilities more closely.

58. **Mr. Pramudwinai** (Thailand), reiterating his Government's commitment to the principle of humanitarianism, said that it attached considerable importance to its partnership with UNHCR, which had been strengthened by decades of cooperation. In its experience, constructive and sincere cooperation with the host Government, based on trust, must be the starting point for any humanitarian endeavour, while every effort should be made to address the root causes of displacement in countries of origin. While international assistance to countries of origin could help to improve the immediate humanitarian situation or the affected population, only concerted international development cooperation could help bring about the sustainable development that would improve the lot of the larger population in those countries. At the same time, those countries had a responsibility to create an environment that would enable their nationals to stay home. While voluntary repatriation, rather than resettlement, should be the preferred solution in dealing with displacement, the international community should share responsibility for providing third-country resettlement where repatriation was not feasible. It was a sad irony that developing countries were shouldering the major share of the displacement burden. Lastly, organizations must adapt to change and his delegation therefore welcomed the ongoing structural and management reform process. It believed that UNHCR would emerge from that process a more effective and efficient organization.

59. **Mr. Buff** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that in contemporary conflicts, large numbers of civilians

were brutally uprooted and forced to flee dangers resulting from violations of international humanitarian law. That body of law was binding on all parties to conflicts, both State and non-State actors, meaning that much of the displacement and devastation that occurred would be prevented if all armed forces and groups complied with it. However, the State and other authorities were often unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibility of protecting civilians in armed conflict, which then became a challenge for the international community. ICRC did its utmost to prevent violations of international humanitarian law, but humanitarian action alone could not ensure comprehensive protection for affected populations. Developing an environment conducive to more effective protection required a range of complementary action in diverse fields, including the judicial, political, economic and, at times, the security and military spheres.

60. ICRC welcomed the enhanced awareness of the plight of IDPs, but cautioned against focusing on them at the expense of other categories of victims. It was wary of preferential categories of victims. It might be assumed, for instance, that IDPs were the worst affected group in an armed conflict, whereas those unable to leave, such as the elderly, disabled or wounded, sometimes faced a much worse situation. More attention also needed to be given to the causes of displacement, in order to avoid undermining preventive efforts.

61. ICRC valued its long-standing relationship with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies and called on States parties to the Geneva Conventions to redouble their efforts to comply, and promote compliance, with international humanitarian law and other bodies of law while ensuring effective protection of civilians affected by armed violence.

62. **Mr. Schultz** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the High Commissioner's report (A/62/12) provided a sobering assessment of the current situation of refugees and displaced persons. International protection principles did indeed underpin all humanitarian interventions for refugees and IDPs, whose numbers were increasing and whose vulnerability was acute. It was not enough for national Governments to declare their commitment to those principles — they must be disseminated and applied at the field level.

63. Protection and assistance must be provided in all circumstances, and IFRC had taken an active interest in United Nations efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. It had taken steps to ensure that its field staff were well trained and that effective reporting, monitoring and investigation mechanisms were in place.

64. IFRC offered a comprehensive package of essential health to all women and children in need, the aim being to enable displaced persons and others living in a state of extreme vulnerability to live in dignity. Expectations of safe motherhood and basic reproductive health care were built into emergency programmes. In that context, he welcomed the High Commissioner's efforts to establish a standard information management system for sexual and gender-based violence. At the Thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to be held in Geneva in late November, those issues would be discussed as part of a broader debate on the humanitarian consequences of international migration. IFRC was not burdened by issues of legal status in its approach to vulnerability and did not have to make a distinction between refugees, IDPs and other persons affected by migration. He therefore welcomed the new UNHCR focus on the migration-asylum nexus. There was certainly a need to address mixed flows and to ensure that the mixtures that were now so common did not lead to people being deprived of their rights or opportunities when seeking to repair their damaged lives.

65. IFRC appreciated the High Commissioner's invitation to participate in the forthcoming Dialogue on Protection Challenges alongside several national societies that had valuable field experience to share. The outcome of the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries, held in Geneva in April, had been a welcome, if overdue, return of attention to millions of people whose lives now lay in ruins. Much needed to be done in order for their dignity to be restored and the High Commissioner could count on IFRC support in that endeavour.

66. **Ms. Gebre-Egziabher** (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) said that in humanitarian situations, the highest concentrations of affected populations lived, or had lived, in urban settlements. Natural and man-made crises either

displaced urban populations or forced rural families into cities in search of security and potential livelihoods, often in vain. Each year, thousands of displaced persons and refugees, in addition to suffering many other forms of loss, lost their rights to housing, land and property due to conflicts or disasters. National and local governments had the responsibility to plan, manage and administer shelter and secure tenure, which were fundamental elements of human settlements. It was during crises that that responsibility was most affected and, paradoxically, that the greatest potential development gains could be realized in the shortest possible time.

67. Although not in itself a humanitarian agency, UN-Habitat worked hand in hand with such agencies, helping to leverage short-term investments in emergency services into longer-term development gain. Failure to act instantly and thoroughly on issues such as housing, land and property dispute resolution often led to renewed conflict when people returned to their places of origin, as demonstrated, inter alia, in southern Sudan and East Timor. Recording and restoring housing, land and property rights was more than a protection issue, it was a fundamental condition for building sustainable peace by revitalizing economic activities and promoting social cohesion and long-term stability.

68. Providing a range of in-situ, non-tent-based emergency shelter options had proved effective in protecting housing, land and property rights, providing disaster survivors with constructive engagement and rebuilding their self-confidence. Many people preferred to receive a "shelter kit" to help them recover damaged building parts and create their own emergency shelter from the rubble, while others opted to engage in communal clean-up and reconstruction. Assessing and recommending alternative, culturally contextual, transitional shelter approaches was the cornerstone of UN-Habitat's engagement in the immediate aftermath of crises.

69. UN-Habitat had been leading efforts to prepare rights-based housing, land and property tools and mechanisms for property restitution and land tenure rights in both customary and statutory systems. In the emergency shelter and early recovery clusters, field support, the production of a range of tools and training materials and oversight of shelter and land-based activities were under way. As a member of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), UN-Habitat was participating in Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)-specific task forces and the ongoing dialogue on thematic priorities in the areas of humanitarian reform, disaster risk mitigation and strengthening of humanitarian country teams. It was also implementing methodologies, pilot programmes, evaluation and assessment missions and technical cooperation programmes in 29 countries. In line with the increased number and complexity of emergencies, it currently had more than 550 staff working in Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan and elsewhere. It had also participated in inter-agency assessments, such as the Darfur Joint Assessment Mission, which had resulted in a new joint programme for promoting peace through recovery. All in all, over the past decade, it had responded to humanitarian shelter and protection needs in 35 countries, while helping to establish conditions for return and reintegration.

70. **Mr. Dall'Oglio** (Observer for the International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that the preservation of international protection in an environment characterized by the growing relevance mixed population flows and a growing awareness of the complexity of population mobility was a complex challenge. Traditional notions of "voluntary" and "forced" migration must henceforth be seen in the context of mobility for a broader range of interlinked reasons, both economic and political.

71. The world was changing and so were the modalities of cooperation between UNHCR and IOM. Third-country resettlement and voluntary repatriation continued to account for a large part of such cooperation, but were being increasingly joined by newer ventures in response to situations that had not been foreseen in 1951, such as providing assistance to IDPs, coming to the aid of victims of displacement as a result of climate change and developing governmental capacity to deal with mixed population flows. To address those aspects, annual consultation between UNHCR and IOM at the executive head level had been revived. The issues discussed most recently included the cluster approach and collaboration in the Global Migration Group (GMG), a promising mechanism designed to bring together intergovernmental partners at the policy and operational levels and to support the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

72. As an active participant in IASC, IOM had been heavily involved in the elaboration and implementation of the cluster approach. It was the global cluster lead

for camp coordination and camp management in IDP situations resulting from natural disasters, while UNHCR had the corresponding lead in situations of conflict-induced displacement. In order to avoid overlapping, increase effectiveness and exploit synergies, UNHCR and IOM had agreed to a unified approach, with joint leadership of cluster proceedings at the global level and the establishment of a joint virtual secretariat. Their partnership had also encompassed eight joint field training exercises over the past year.

73. Above all, it was at the programme level that everyday work brought UNHCR and IOM together in countless initiatives and humanitarian responses. In fact, a joint regional seminar on building capacity to manage migration in the Caribbean was currently under way in the Cayman Islands, with a special focus on cooperation in managing mixed migratory flows within a human rights framework. IOM looked forward to forging an even stronger working relationship with UNHCR in order to promote collaboration on areas of common concern and enhance the protection of refugees within the broader migration context.

74. **Mr. Bouchaara** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation had made only general comments on the item, whereas the representative of Algeria had referred to the specific situation of refugees in the Tindouf area of Algeria, claiming that their future depended on a political solution. Surely, for assistance to be rendered to people in need, it was simply a question of respecting the non-political mandate of UNHCR and implementing relevant Executive Committee conclusions and General Assembly resolutions that reiterated clearly that the voluntary repatriation of refugees must not be political. If the representative of Algeria had problems with the UNHCR estimate of the Saharan refugees, a new census of the refugees should be carried out. The real question was why no such census had been conducted since 1975.

75. **Ms. Abdelhak** (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the protection of refugees was indeed non-political, but that a census of the Saharan refugees was vital to a settlement of the question of Western Sahara. Had UNHCR and WFP not conducted their own census, they would not have halved their assistance to the refugees. In actual fact, under the settlement plan signed by the Government of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, the Identification Commission had identified 155,430 refugees in 2000. That figure had now risen to 165,000.

76. **Mr. Bouchaara** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the dispute over figures was assuming Kafkaesque proportions. Since 1975, the Government of Algeria had prevented UNHCR from conducting a census of the refugees and the humanitarian situation had remained static. The representative of Algeria had an unusual take on demography. If the figure of 165,000 was to be believed, then there would have been no deaths, births or departures of refugees since 1975.

77. **Ms. Abdelhak** (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, reiterated that the situation of the Saharan refugees was inseparable from the peace process in the region. Since 1975, the international community had adopted several resolutions calling for a referendum, but nothing had been done. According to the figures on which UNHCR and WFP seemed to have based their decision to halve their assistance, half the refugees must have died and there must have been no births. Her delegation contested those figures and hoped that United Nations-led negotiations would result in a solution that would allow the Saharan refugees to be counted and their right to self-determination to be duly exercised.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.